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ABSTRACT

Utilizing data from the Federal Employee Attitude Survey, 1979, a survey was distributed to a stratified random sample of 20,000 employees to identify and analyze the factors influencing federal employee worker satisfaction. Questions on the survey ranged from demographics to personal evaluations of the work environment as recorded on a five-choice Likert scale. Analysis of findings showed that meaningfulness of work, autonomy in the job, feedback received, role clarity, and satisfaction with pay consistently increased job satisfaction. Consistently, higher levels of intrinsic motivation proved to be negatively associated with satisfaction. Further analysis indicated that job satisfaction was more dependent upon factors that related to the tasks themselves, while overall working conditions seemed to have less impact. Autonomy in the workplace, group cohesiveness, feedback, levels of trust, and role clarity appeared to have more impact on job satisfaction than salary. Additionally, educational level and age appeared to be significant demographic factors affecting job satisfaction. Major areas of dissatisfaction appeared to center upon inadequacies of performance appraisals, a lack of knowledge of what would influence promotion and pay increases, and insufficient credit for public service. It was also commonly cited that bureaucracies were impersonal because of their emphasis upon specialization and fragmentation and their resistance to innovation. (HOD)

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Factors Influencing Federal Employee Worker Satisfaction: A Baseline Study

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Factors Influencing Federal Employee Worker Satisfaction

A Baseline Study

Job satisfaction may well be the most studied human factor in organizations, with much of the work resulting from the interest generated by the Hawthorne studies and the point of view known as "human relations." The logic underlying the human relations point of view was the assumption that if workers are committed to their jobs they will be more productive. Such a commitment is likely to be made because of, and reflected by, the level of job satisfaction. By increasing job satisfaction, goes the assumption, worker performance will improve (Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Filley and House, 1969; Carvell, 1970). While the Hawthorne studies focused attention on worker satisfaction and performance, both the research methods and the conclusions have been questioned (Bendix and Fisher, 1949; Kerr, 1953; Landsberger, 1958; Etzioni, 1964; Sykes, 1965; Carey, 1967; Rice, 1982). Although studies measuring job satisfaction (or worker attitudes toward work) with different measures of performance reveal a low correlation (Vroom, 1964), there is some evidence that higher job satisfaction may follow better job performance (Greene, 1973). This is likely to happen when the higher performance is followed by receiving a reward important to the worker (praise, salary increase, or promotion) when a job is well done. So, worker satisfaction is an active area of interest as well as research.

A number of factors affecting job satisfaction have been identified. One characteristic of any organization is its size in numbers of members. Job satisfaction in larger organizations tends to be less than in smaller organizations (Indik, 1963). Another structural characteristic that affects job satisfaction is the shape of the organization, "tall" or "flat." These simple descriptive terms are actually reflections of several other characteristics,

such as numbers of hierarchical levels and spans of control for organizations of a given size. Here rather complex relationships are found to exist relative to worker satisfaction (Porter and Lawler, III, 1964; Porter and Siegel, 1965). Job satisfaction is also related to the communication climate within the organizational environment. Findings suggest that job satisfaction as well as performance are improved by a climate of openness and candor, with due respect for legitimate areas of privacy (Willits, 1967; Indik, Georgopoulos, and Seashore, 1971). In addition to these, there are a number of job characteristics influencing worker satisfaction which according to Herzberg (1959) may be labeled as "satisfiers" or "dissatisfiers," depending on whether they affect satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Hertzberg (1970) in a later study found these same variables to be operant. Others have also found that task activity, achievement, responsibility, money, recognition, interpersonal relations, and working conditions significantly effect worker satisfaction (Locke and Schneider, 1971; Locke, 1973).

This interest in identifying those factors affecting job and worker satisfaction may stem from research findings suggesting that a definite and consistent relationship exists between job satisfaction and the turnover and absenteeism rate among workers (Vroom, 1964). The costs incurred by organizations due to turnover are fringe benefits, severance pay, overtime costs, under-utilization of facilities, administrative expenses, training cost, and productivity losses (Jeswald, 1974). Nash and Carroll (1975) estimate that a rank-and-file employee who quits can cost a company at least $3,000. The costs are significantly greater for managers and professional employees. Carroll and Tosi (1977) observe that if 10 percent of a rank-and-file work force of 1,000 workers quits each year, then turnover costs will amount to at least $300,000. So, while it is very difficult to associate job satisfaction with productivity, costs are involved thus necessitating an effort to determine what factors may

increase job satisfaction. But, the majority of research has focused on the private sector. There is a paucity of research on the public sector and worker satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to extend the work of previous research in an effort to understand more fully the factors affecting worker attitudes influencing job satisfaction. In an attempt to build upon the current research base, variable were explored and hypotheses proposed relative to federal employees.

According to reports released by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), "federal employees are generally quite satisfied with their jobs." And while certain areas of dissatisfaction are evident, the OPM states that "relatively few" workers plan to seek new jobs. A summary of their preliminary report states:

> (Employees) indicate that they work hard and that their jobs are important to them; their jobs make use of their abilities and also provide them with a sense of accomplishment. In general, employee's reactions to the work itself represent their past positive sentiments toward any aspect of their worklife . . . More negative feelings center upon the organizations in which they do their work. They report that their organizations are effective, and they generally do not plan to leave them. However, there is distrust of the organization, feelings of being uninformed and a skepticism about whether the organization can change for the better (Federal Employee Attitudes Survey, 1979).

This general study on federal workers did not examine employee satisfaction per se and therefore does not accurately reflect the attitudes of federal workers relative to job satisfaction. The purpose of this study was to identify

areas of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction and to weigh the relative impacts upon overall satisfaction of each factor.

Specifically, the focus of the study described here was to identify and analyze the factors influencing federal employee worker satisfaction. The factors analyzed were demographic variables and worker attitudes. The study analyzed all demographic differentials affecting job satisfaction plus additional variations. The specific hypotheses addressed were:

H_1 Demographic variables would be significantly associated with differentials in job satisfaction. It was estimated that:

a) Males achieve higher levels of job satisfaction.

b) Non-minorities achieve higher levels of job satisfaction.

c) Higher levels of education would be negatively correlated with levels of job satisfaction.

d) Increased age would be positively associated with high job satisfaction.

e) Higher pay levels would be associated with high job satisfaction.

H_2 Worker assessment of the job environment in regard to specific factors would impact upon levels of satisfaction. It was estimated that:

a) Factors such as intrinsic motivation, challenging job tasks, and individual worker autonomy would be positively associated with high satisfaction.

b) Organizational communication patterns, both formal and informal, would significantly impact upon job satisfaction, work-group cohesiveness and organizational trust.

c) Supervisor-subordinate relationships and the caliber of performance evaluations would be significantly correlated with job satisfaction.

Method

While certain basic information was made available by the Office of Personnel Management in their preliminary report, it was felt that a more in-depth analysis was required. While the government did report the relative frequencies of responses on selected items, they did not report any findings on several items which these researchers felt would be significant. Additionally, the preliminary reports did little to explain which factors appeared to be most influential in the determination of worker satisfaction. Also, certain published reports appeared to be contradictory, and it was felt that additional investigation might be helpful in order to explain the relationship between the confusing and contradictory responses. Utilizing basic frequencies and descriptive statistics, crosstabulations, the computation of correlation coefficients, regression tables, and discriminant analysis the researchers attempted to expand the significance of the report.

Subjects

This study utilized data from the Federal Employee Attitude Survey, 1979. The survey was distributed to a stratified random sample of 20,000 employees with 13,862 persons returning the survey and thus, constituting the data used in this study. In order to achieve a truly representative sample, certain sub-groups were over-represented so that a potential low-response rate would not bias selection. It was estimated that a forty percent response rate was required for the sample to be unbiased. A seventy percent response rate was realized resulting in a much more precise stratified sampling than required.

Procedure

A 263 item survey constituted the data base. Questions ranged from demographics to personal evaluations of the work environment as recorded on

a five choice Likert scale. Table 1 lists the specific factors which were utilized.

In tabulating the results, certain item rsponses were combined to formulate indices of certain factors. Many of the factors utilized had been previously subjected to factor analysis by the OPM. In those cases where the factors had been demonstrated to be valid indexes, the identical factors were formulated and utilized. In instances where the relevant factors had not been pre-determined, new factors were generated. These new factors were not subjected to factor analysis, but rather rest upon face validity and a high degree of similarity in frequency distribution. It was estimated that the newly generated factors did reflect measures of sufficient validity that they could be examined with sufficient confidence.

The study measured total worker satisfaction based on responses to the questionnaire. It was assumed that questionnaire responses of "agree" and "strongly agree" indicated a high belief and/or support for the proposition while responses of "disagree" and "strongly disagree" indicated a low belief and/or support for the proposition. The "undecided" to each proposition were disregarded as being too ambivalent to warrant consideration in the research and were added together with the other missing cases. Missing cases were never greater than one percent of all responses given for any one variable.

Results

Demographic Findings

Hypothesis 1 predicts that demographic variables will be significantly associated with differentials in job satisfaction. Data pertaining to Hypothesis 1 results from the analysis of and correlations between sex, ethnicity, education, age, tenure, work schedules, appraisal reviews, and salary.

There was a higher frequency of employed males (73.3%) than females (26.2%). Additionally, females were more likely to be of a minority class, less educated, younger, and employed for fewer years than their male counterparts.

Job satisfaction related to sex revealed that males were slightly more satisfied than females with their jobs. As for cross tabulations, overall tests indicated general satisfaction for both sexes towards their jobs, however dissatisfaction with their specific jobs. When controlling for gender, tests indicated that a higher percentage of females were dissatisfied as compared to males with their specific work. Similarly, attitudes towards challenges offered by the job indicated an overall concensus that their jobs were challenging. yet a higher percentage of females felt their jobs were not as challenging as compared to males.

The frequencies indicate that the majority of federal employees are white. The minorities tend to be less well educated, slightly younger, and employed for fewer years. Job satisfaction related to ethnicity revealed a strong indication that minorities were dissatisfied with their jobs. Cross tabulations indicated a medium to high level of job satisfaction for all but when controlling for ethnicity, statistics indicated that blacks tend to be slightly more dissatisfied than whites or other minorities.

Clearly, education was the overall most significant variable affecting worker satisfaction. The higher educated employees were less satisfied with their jobs and more dissatisfied with their salaries than less educated employees. The cross tabulations indicated a clear reversal of job satisfaction after experiencing some college/university education (i.e., those with only elementary, high school, or technical training were more satisfied than employees with at least some college/university experience).

The majority of employees were in their 30's or 40's. The older workers were more satisfied with their jobs as well as their salaries than younger employees.

The cross tabulations disclosed that workers age 54 and under were markedly less satisfied than workers 55+.

When measuring tenure, employees with greater tenure were less satisfied with their jobs but more satisfied with their salaries. The cross tabulations indicated that after working for approximately four years job satisfaction continually declined.

The majority of employees worked fixed schedules. Results indicate that those working flexible schedules were less satisfied than those working fixed schedules and those working flexible schedules were less satisfied with their pay. Cross tabulations supported these findings indicating that employees with flexible schedules were less satisfied.

The majority of employees received job appraisals at least yearly if not multi-monthly. Some received no job appraisals. Those employees with the most frequent appraisals were less satisfied with their jobs than those receiving annual reviews. Cross tabulations indicated that those who never received appraisals were equally dissatisfied.

Finally, job satisfaction and salary appeared to be high correlated. Those receiving higher salaries were significantly more satisfied with their jobs. The cross tabulations supported these findings.

The demographic variables were then run against each other in a step-wise multi-variate regression. This regression indicated that, when controlling for the combination of all demographic variables against job satisfaction, education completed, age, and salary respectively contributed most to job satisfaction. Table 2 indicates the Beta scores for these and less significant variables. The discriminant analysis indicated like results and supported the regression indications. A composit picture of the most satisfied federal employee was a white, non-college educated, older, long-tenured, fixed scheduled, annually appraised, highly payed male.

Attitudinal Findings

Hypothesis 2 predicts that worker assessment of the job environment in regard to specific factors will impact upon levels of job satisfaction. Data pertaining to Hypothesis 2 results from the analysis of and correlations between attitudinal survey responses.

In response to the broad measure utilized to assess job satisfaction ("In general I like working here") the majority of respondents (65.9%) indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed with a decidedly small number (27.4%) indicating disagreed or strongly disagreed. A smaller number (57.9%) indicated being satisfied with their specific jobs and in terms of work performed on the job even fewer persons appeared to be satisfied (82.2%).

The majority of workers surveyed (68.3%) believed that challenging work responsibilities were either important or very important. Those who perceived their job assignments to be personally challenging, utilizing their own abilities and initiative, were much more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction (r=.23790). The report of challenging work tasks was most highly correlated with higher levels of meaningful work (r=.5271), with individual autonomy (r=.4649), group cohesiveness (r=.2845), and levels of supervisory feedback received (r=.2237).

One of the highest correlates of job satisfaction was the aspect of "meaningfulness" of work. The greater the personal meaning associated with the job, the greater overall satisfaction (r=.3455). The meaningfulness of work was positively associated with high levels of job autonomy (r=.6195), high levels of group cohesiveness (r=.3808), levels of feedback (r=.3587), effective organizational communications (r=.2615), and role clarity (r=.1635). Meaningful work was highly correlated with consideration of resignation (r=.4399).

Higher levels of intrinsic motivation were associated with lower levels of job satisfaction (r=.13009). Also, higher levels of intrinsic motivation were

suprisingly negatively associated with autonomy and levels of feedback received.

A majority of employees (70%) reported that they were adequately informed about policy/procedural changes but only a small number indicated receiving performance feedback (26%). The majority (51%) agreed that information pertaining to performance usually came "too late to do any good" and believed (80%) that they did not receive feedback which helped them to improve performance. Organizational Communication patterns did not appear to correlate as significantly as hypothesized with job satisfaction levels. However, other measures of communications did impact more significantly--meaningfulness of work (r=.2615), worker autonomy (r=.1991), and group cohesiveness (r=1575). And, those more satisfied with organizational communication patterns did report higher levels of job satisfaction (r=.1443).

The majority (87.9%) indicated a significant problem relative to role clarity when responding to the statement, "Most of the Time I know what I have to do on my job." Role clarity correlated with job satisfaction (r=.1703). Role clarity was associated most highly with liklihood of quitting (r=.4562), autonomy (r=.2167), and meaningfulness of work (r=.1635).

Respondents (53.8%) believed that they could not trust the particular agency and some (23.3%) agreed that others in the agency would do things behind their backs. Still, organizational trust was less correlated with job satisfaction (r=.0879) than expected.

Respondents (71.4%) indicated that competition between work groups caused problems in getting work done and that competition between work groups caused pressure on the job (52%). It was also noted (60%) that work groups were not well coordinated. However, work groups and decision-making was not significantly correlated with any of the measured factors. Some correlation with group cohesiveness was observed (r=.1042) but in relation to other factors it was not correlated positively or negatively (r=.0092).

The overwhelming majority of respondents (93.2%) indicated that they had a great deal of control over how they allotted their time and most (61%) replied that their jobs required little checking or meeting with others--essentially "one person" jobs. Almost all (92.3%) indicated that they were employed in positions which allowed them to exercise their own judgment and initiative. This individual autonomy was highly correlated with job satisfaction (r=.3412). High levels of autonomy was most highly correlated with feedback received (r=.4313), group cohesiveness (r=.3809), organizational communications (r=.1991) and role clarity (r=.2167). It was also highly correlated with job turnover (r=.5162). Job turnover was also significantly related to high levels of autonomy (r=.5162), role clarity (r=.4562), meaningfulness of work (r=.4399), group cohesiveness (r=.3453), challenge (r=.3424), and feedback received (r=.3553).

Performance appraisals and supervisory feedback corresponded possitively with job satisfaction (r=.2431). Respondents did not believe that performance evaluations identified strengths and weaknesses (76.7%), aided in planning/training development (88.1%), or helped to improve performance (77.2%). A majority (87%) indicated that they were not aware of the standards utilized to evaluate performance. Additionally, employees surveyed believed that hard work would not increase respect from colleagues (60%). Moreover, moderate performance would not engender the assignment of routine tasks (78%) or contribute to demotion (70.5%).

The respondents were also asked to assess certain factors effecting their acceptacne of government employment. Table 3 lists in importance selected items. Workers were satisfied with the chances for promotion (80.2%), job security (71.9%), and personal accomplishment (71.9%). A majority of workers (89.9%) stated that they worked very hard on the job but an even larger number of workers (98%) indicated that others exerted pressure upon those working hard

tc decrease outputs. Finally, a majority of federal employees (59.5%) indicated that they "care little what happens to the particular agency so long as I get a paycheck." Only a small number (5.3%) of respondents strongly disagreed.

Most respondents reported that they were satisfied with their jobs, but expressed less satisfaction with the specific tasks they performed and with the rewards they received for their performance. Workers surveyed indicated that they highly valued such concepts as personal satisfaction from work, achievement of a sense of accomplishment, and challenge. Most reported that they did not know what was expected of them on the job, or what standards were utilized in performance evaluations. Many indicated high levels of distrust and reported high levels of competition between work groups which resulted in job pressure. Major areas of dissatisfaction centered upon job appraisals, lack of recognition for public service, and a lack of adequate supervisory feedback. So, despite the high level of general satisfaction there exists much dissatisfaction with a great majority of respondents planning to seek other employment.

Discussion

While the correlations observed can assist in delineating those factors which are inter-related and those which do appear to impact upon worker satisfaction, they do little to explain the relative impacts of each variable or factor. For this reason, multivariate regression techniques were utilized. By utilization of step-wise regressions, those factorial impacts upon job satisfaction which would tend to disappear after controlling for the impacts of other factors could be identified. Eventually, then, it was hoped that the most influential of the variables examined would surface. Separate regressions were initiated for both demographic and attitudinal variables. The more influential of these variables were then combined.

While such demographic variables as gender and ethnicity, and other factors such as length of employment, work schedule, and frequency of appraisal had been found to be correlated with high levels of job satisfaction, the impacts of these tended to disappear after controlling for age, salary grade, and education. This may suggest that the impacts of those demographic variables such as gender and ethnicity, as well as length of employment and scheduling were actually confounded by the other factors.

In the initial regressions which utilized the various attitudinal factors, certain variables appeared to be consistently significant. Meaningfulness of work, autonomy in the job, feedback received, role clarity, and satisfaction with pay consistently proved to posit positive impacts upon job satisfaction. Consistently, higher levels of intrinsic motivation proved to be negatively associated with satisfaction.

In the final regressions, several of these factors were combined. The results of the final regressions are summarized in Table 4.

What this analysis tends to indicate is that job satisfaction, at least in this baseline study, was more dependent upon factors which relate to the tasks themselves. Overall working conditions seemed to have less impact. Autonomy in the workplace, group cohesiveness, feedback, levels of trust, and role clarity appeared to have more impact upon job satisfaction than salary. Additionally, the educational level of the workers as well as age appeared to be significant demographic factors affecting job satisfaction.

Our findings appear to indicate that most federal workers in this sample appear more influenced by factors which relate to the actual work accomplished than by more mechanical impacts such as salary received. Such factors as meaningful and challenging work, individual autonomy, and various measures of communications and feedback patterns influence job satisfaction.

Generally, most workers indicated that "I like working here," yet in subsequent responses, the overwhelming majority indicated that they often think of quitting and most are considering seeking other employment. Major areas of dissatisfaction appeared to center upon inadequacies of performance appraisals, a lack of knowledge of what will definitely influence promotion and pay increases, and all respondents did not feel that they received sufficient credit for public service. However, few indicated that they truly desired to influence public affairs and provide public service. In fact, those found to be most intrinsically motivated, whether in terms of providing public service or personal identification with tasks performed appeared to be the least satisfied employees. And while many indicated personal accomplishment, over half indicated that they cared little for the particular federal agency so long as they received a pay check. So the results at times were contradictory and definitely inconsistent with the previously published reports by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM).

These workers were all participating in governmental bureaucratic agencies. The most traditionally cited bureaucratic problem areas again surfaced. Specifically, numerous inadequacies of the performace appraisal system were cited by workers. This problem is a traditional Waterloo of bureaucracies, as are problems related to communication patterns, role clarity, inter-group competition, and coordination of fragmented work groups due to specialization. Additionally, it is commonly cited that bureaucracies are impersonal due to their emphasis upon specialization and fragmentation, consequently creating difficulties in enlisting the loyalty, trust, and commitment of workers. This difficulty was evidenced in this particular study. The bureaucratic organization is also attributed as being non-conducive to change and innovation. In this study, workers reflected this attitude with the majority of respondents agreeing that the likelihood of major organizational change was rather dismal.

It should be noted that total precision was hindered due to the poor formulation of the original (OPM) questionnaire. The questionnaire utilized unequally weighted and collapsed cells causing extreme difficulty in disaggregation necessary for the purpose of this research. However, it is hoped that future researchers will expand upon these findings. Future employee surveys of federal workers should be contrasted with this baseline data in order to assess any areas of intervening improvement or decline. It could also reflect upon the impact of the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. It would also be interesting to contrast these findings with a similar survey of representative private workers and compare their satisfaction in selected areas with overall worker satisfaction.

The issue of job satisfaction requires futher investigation. Certain questions still need to be answered, particularly relative to federal employees versus those in private business: How can communication patterns be made more effective? What can be done to increase loyalty and trust? Can the pressure due to competition be reduced? Why are performance appraisals useless and delimiting? Are there procedures and methods which could reduce worker turnover? What can be done to overcome bureaucratic problems affecting worker satisfaction?

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Table 1

Demographic and Attitudinal Factors Measured

Demographic Factors

sex	tenure
ethnicity	work schedules
education	performance appraisals
age	salary

Attitudinal Factors

job satisfaction	group cohesiveness
challenge	frequency of performance feedback
meaning/importance	preferred frequency of performance feedback
intrinsic motivation	autonomy
organizational communication	decision-making
role clarity	likelihood of quitting
trust	satisfaction with salary

Table 2

Demographic Beta Scores for Least and Most Satisfied Workers

Least Satisfied Workers	
Most educated workers	Beta - 0.11409
Workers with more frequent appraisals	Beta - 0.4727
Ethnic groups	Beta - 0.04444
Workers with flexible schedules	Beta - 0.02400
Female employees	Beta - 0.01213
Most Satisfied Workers	
Non-ethnic workers	Beta - 0.06488
Workers with less tenure	Beta - 0.06251
Older workers	Beta - 9.11624
Workers indicating at least "adequate" salaries	Beta - 0.09301

Table 3

Factors Effecting Acceptance of Government Employment
(In Order of Importance)

Job security	67.1%
Fringe benefits	59.9%
Salary	51.2%
Opportunity for public service	38.9%
Opportunity to impact upon public affairs	32.1%
Only job available	20.9%

Table 4

Results of Combined Attitudinal Regressions

Meaningfulness of work	Beta - .19840
Intrinsic motivation	Beta - .12254
Worker autonomy	Beta - .09209
Role-clarity	Beta - .08408
Feedback received	Beta - .07411
Organizational trust	Beta - .05212
Salary satisfaction	Beta - .03927
Organizational communications	Beta - .03220